

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 217070 TOSEC 250043

FOLLOWING REPEAT PRETORIA 3913 ACTION SECSTATE INFO CAPE TOWN
DURBAN JOHANNESBURG 1 SEP QUOTE

C O N F I D E N T I A L PRETORIA 3913

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS ECON SF

SUBJ: FUTURE PROSPECTS FOR SOUTH AFRICA

REF: STATE 215846

1. FOLLOWING IS EMBASSY'S ASSESSMENT REQUESTED REFTEL:

2. THE RACIAL DISTURBANCES THAT BROKE OUT IN SOWETO
ON JUNE 16 AND SPREAD TO OTHER URBAN CENTERS AND SOME
HOMELAND AREAS DURING JULY AND AUGUST REPRESENT A BLACK
(AND COLORED) PROTEST MOVEMENT PRINCIPALLY OF STUDENT
ACTIVISTS AGAINST THE SYSTEM OF APARTHEID. THE ACTION
WAS CONFINED TO BLACK AND COLORED AREAS AND THE TARGETS
WERE THE SYMBOLS OF WHITE ADMINISTRATION WHICH THEY
ASSOCIATE WITH THEIR GRIEVANCES. EFFORTS TO CARRY THE
PROTEST TO WHITE AREAS TOOK PEACEFUL FORMS (A SYMPATHY
MARCH AND WORK BOYCOTTS) AND THESE HAVE BEEN ONLY PARTLY
SUCCESSFUL AND SHORT-LIVED. POLICE UNITS WERE ABLE TO
CONTAIN THE DISTURBANCES WITHIN THE TOWNSHIPS
WITHOUT RESORTING TO MILITARY REINFORCEMENTS. WHILE
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ADULT BLACKS LARGELY SYMPATHIZE WITH THE OBJECTIVES

OF YOUTHFUL ACTIVISTS, RELATIVELY FEW HAVE OPENLY SUPPORTED THEIR TACTICS AND MANY REFLECT INCREASING CONCERN OVER THE MATERIAL DESTRUCTION AND LOSS OF LIFE WITHIN THEIR OWN COMMUNITIES. AT PRESENT A RELATIVE CALM HAS SETTLED DOWN OVER AREAS OF DISTURBANCE.

3. WHILE THE GRIEVANCES OF BLACKS UNDER THE APARTHEID SYSTEM ARE DEEP-SEATED AND VALID, THE YOUNG ACTIVISTS HAVE SO FAR NOT ATTACKED INDIVIDUALS OR INSTALLATIONS IN WHITE AREAS. WITH ONE OR TWO MINOR EXCEPTIONS, WE KNOW OF NO CASES OF WILLFUL DAMAGE TO OFFICES, COMMERCIAL ESTABLISHMENTS, INDUSTRIAL PLANTS OR PUBLIC BUILDINGS. THIS REINFORCES THE CONCLUSION THAT UP TO NOW THE PROTEST EFFORT IS NOT DIRECTED AT WHITES PER SE BUT AT THE APARTHEID SYSTEM WHICH IS THE SOURCE OF THEIR GRIEVANCES.

4. WHILE BLACK AND COLORED YOUTH HAS BEEN RADICALIZED BY THE EXPERIENCE OF THE PAST TWO AND A HALF MONTHS, WE DO NOT BELIEVE THAT THE ALIENATION HAS REACHED A POINT OF NO RETURN. SAG RESPONSIVENESS TO THE GRIEVANCES, IF SINCERE AND MEANINGFUL, COULD HAVE DAMPENING EFFECT ON THE BLACK PROTEST MOVEMENT AND CONTRIBUTE TO DOMESTIC STABILIZATION. SAG COOPERATION IN ACHIEVING A PEACEFUL TRANSITION TO MAJORITY RULE IN RHODESIA AND IN THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN INDEPENDENT, UNITARY STATE IN NAMIBIA WILL SHOW A FLEXIBILITY THAT WILL HELP TO ALLEVIATE PRESSURES. MORE IMPORTANTLY, IT CAN TAKE STEPS WITHIN THE TOWNSHIPS TO REMOVE THE MORE HUMILIATING AND OPPRESSIVE ASPECTS OF BANTU ADMINISTRATION, GIVING URBAN BLACKS A GREATER STAKE IN THEIR COMMUNITIES AND A PARTICIPATORY ROLE IN DIRECTING THEIR OWN AFFAIRS. THERE IS HIGH EXPECTATION IN WHITE CIRCLES (ALTHOUGH CONSIDERABLE SKEPTICISM AMONG BLACKS) THE THE KISSINGER-VORSTER TALKS AND NATIONAL PARTY CONGRESSES TO BE HELD DURING SEPTEMBER WILL RESULT IN SIGNIFICANT CHANGES IN THE TREATMENT OF URBAN BLACKS.

5. THE SOUTH AFRICAN ECONOMY IS NOW IN A SERIOUS RECESSION, ARISING IN CONSIDERABLE MEASURE FROM HEAVY DEFENSE SPENDING
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AND OIL STOCKPILING, WHICH IN TURN IS CAUSED BY DETERIORATED SECURITY SITUATION IN SOUTHERN AFRICA. BLACKS SUFFER MOST--FIRST, BECAUSE THEY HAVE BEEN VICTIMS OF VIRTUALLY ALL UNEMPLOYMENT; SECOND, BECAUSE THEY ARE HIT HARDEST BY INFLATION; AND, THIRD, BECAUSE CAPITAL SPENDING ON TOWNSHIP FACILITIES, HOUSING, EDUCATION, ETC. HAS BEEN HELD IN CHECK. ACTIONS AT THIS TIME WHICH WOULD SHAKE CONFIDENCE IN THE SHORT-TERM VIABILITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

WOULD TEND TO INTENSIFY THIS VICTIMIZATION OF BLACKS
AND COMPOUND THE RACIAL PROBLEM.

6. LOOKING BEYOND IMMEDIATE ECONOMIC DIFFICULTIES,
WE SEE MANY STRENGTHS IN THE ECONOMY. THE SOUTH AFRICAN
BALANCE OF PAYMENTS AND FOREIGN SHORT-TERM CREDIT
SITUATIONS ARE NOT ALARMING COMPARED TO MANY OTHER
COUNTRIES. FURTHER LOWERING OF THE GOLD PRICE WOULD
DELAY EFFORTS TO PULL OUT OF THE RECESSION. HOWEVER,
PROSPECT OF HIGHER EXPORT PRICES FOR MINERALS, MATURATION
IN THE NEXT 12-18 MONTHS OF EXPENSIVE, EXPORT-ORIENTED
CAPITAL PROJECTS, ANTICIPATED SUCCESS OF BELT-TIGHTENING,
ETC., ALL LEAD US TO CONCLUDE THAT THE COUNTRY IS
CREDITWORTHY WHEN VIEWED IN TERMS OF ITS MEDIUM-TERM
ECONOMIC SITUATION.

7. ALTHOUGH THE SAG HAS MADE FEW OVERT CONCESSIONS TO
BLACKS, THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY AND OTHER ELEMENTS OF
SOCIETY HAVE BECOME INCREASINGLY OUTSPOKEN IN CALL FOR
REMOVAL OF THE MORE DEHUMANIZING FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION
AND INJUSTICE. SELF-INTEREST IS A FACTOR. WHITE BUSINESS
SEES CLEARLY THE HARM CAUSED BY INSTABILITY, BOTH
DIRECTLY THROUGH LOSS OF PRODUCTION AND BUSINESS FROM
BLACK CUSTOMERS, AND INDIRECTLY THROUGH EFFECTS ON SOUTH
AFRICA'S INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL AND TRADE POSITION.
WE THINK BUSINESS WILL INCREASINGLY PRESSURE THE
GOVERNMENT TO MAKE CONCESSIONS TO BLACKS. THE SAG
IS RESPONSIVE TO PRESSURE FROM THIS SECTOR.

8. THE WARNING SIGNALS ON THE DOMESTIC FRONT, COINCIDING
WITH SECRETARY KISSINGER'S INITIATIVES WITH RESPECT TO
SOUTHERN AFRICA, AFFORD THE SAG THE MOTIVATION AND
OPPORTUNITY TO MOVE DECISIVELY IN REMOVING THE SOURCES
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OF INSTABILITY IN SOUTH AFRICA. OUR ENCOURAGEMENT IN
THIS REGARD COULD CONTRIBUTE SUBSTANTIALLY TO THEIR
WILLINGNESS TO TAKE THE RISKS INVOLVED.
BOWDLER
UNQTE. ROBINSON

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